

Central Intelligence Agency



Washington, D. C. 20505

22 March 1982

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Ambassador Jeane J. Kirkpatrick  
U. S. Mission to the United Nations  
799 U.N. Plaza  
New York, New York 10017

Dear Madam Ambassador:

The material you requested on Saturday is enclosed for you. We hope it will provide you support in responding to the Nicaraguans.

[redacted] If we can be of further help, please advise us.  
You may use any or all of this material.

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Sincerely,

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[redacted]  
R. E. Hineman  
Associate Deputy Director for Intelligence

Enclosure:  
As stated

22 March 1982

RESPONSE TO NICARAGUA'S COMPLAINT TO THE UN SECURITY COUNCIL,  
19 MARCH 1982

US overflights of Nicaragua were to safeguard US interests in the area as well as those of other states, who are increasingly threatened by the actions of the Sandinista government. These actions include not only the dramatic buildup of Nicaraguan armed forces, but also the provision of arms, training, and other support to Marxist-dominated insurgents attempting to overthrow governments throughout Central America. The nature of these threats more than justifies efforts to monitor them.

NICARAGUAN MILITARY BUILDUP

In the first case, and in contrast to Somoza's small and poorly equipped National Guard, the Sandinistas have built a heavily armed standing army supplemented by militia and reserve elements that totals some 70,000 men. It outstrips every other Central American army in manpower. It has alarmed Nicaragua's neighbors, and it has become a major destabilizing factor in the regional military balance. The Sandinistas now have 49 active military installations--36 built since Somoza's overthrow--to house this force. Most of the garrisons are built in the Soviet and Cuban style, with uniform layouts including obstacle courses, vehicle storage sheds, and barracks areas.

Nicaragua's regular infantry units have been completely equipped with a variety of Soviet bloc small arms, including

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AK-47 assault rifles, Czech machineguns, and RPG-7 grenade launchers. Older Western rifles have largely disappeared from the army inventory; some have gone to militia and reserve forces, and many apparently have been sent to Salvadoran and Guatemalan insurgents.

Nicaragua's armor and artillery have been greatly expanded, giving it a distinct advantage in both over any of its neighbors. This new equipment includes Soviet-made 57 mm antitank guns and 152 mm howitzers, 800 East German military trucks, about 25 Soviet-made T-55 tanks with 100 mm guns, 12 armored personnel carriers, and river crossing equipment for the tanks, which give Nicaragua an offensive capability.

In addition to the land forces buildup, the Sandinistas have acquired over a hundred ZPU-4 and ZU-23 antiaircraft guns and large numbers of SA-7 surface-to-air missiles. They also are expected to receive Soviet-made MIG fighter aircraft soon. There are about 50 Nicaraguan pilots training on MIGs in Cuba and Bulgaria, and they probably will return to their country sometime this year. In addition, four airfields--Sandino International Airport, Puerto Cabezas, Montelimar, and Bluefields--currently are being expanded and improved to handle sophisticated fighter aircraft. Once Nicaragua begins to receive MIG fighters sometime this year and after the pilot training and airfield expansion are completed, it will have the most powerful air force in Central America.

The Cuban influence in the Nicaraguan military is pervasive. There are some 2,000 Cuban military and security

advisers in Nicaragua, including advisers from the general staff level down to individual companies. The total Cuban contingent in Nicaragua--approximately 6,000--is employed in a variety of areas, including construction of airfields and military garrisons, and Cubans are found in practically every Nicaraguan government agency. While the Soviet advisory presence is not nearly as large, perhaps 50 personnel, Soviet officers are advising the Nicaraguan general staff and have helped in the preparation of military plans.

#### ARMS INFILTRATION

##### Overview

Within weeks after the fall of Somoza in July 1979, the Sandinistas began to cooperate with Cuba in supporting the Salvadoran, Honduran, and Guatemalan extreme left by establishing training camps and by beginning arms deliveries. This clandestine assistance initially involved local black markets and relatively limited resources. In 1980, after a unified Salvadoran guerrilla command structure under Communist control was established with Cuban help, the Sandinista leadership decided to manage directly an arms trafficking system of unprecedented proportions and which originated outside the hemisphere.

Arms for the Salvadoran insurgents reach Nicaragua by direct flights and by ship from Havana. Three Nicaraguan ships, the Aracely, the Monimbo, and the Nicarao, have been identified transporting arms to Nicaragua from Cuba, as have Cuban and other vessels. These arms are stockpiled in Nicaragua until the

Salvadoran guerrilla headquarters near Managua arranges for their shipment into El Salvador.

The timing of deliveries is coordinated with the planned level of fighting, and deliveries are made by several methods. In addition, the guerrilla support networks vary the routes for security reasons. Aerial deliveries were important before and through the period of the failed January 1981 final offensive, but this method does not now provide the bulk of the guerrillas' weapons. The main overland trafficking routes from Nicaragua to El Salvador are through Honduras, and Honduran officials succeeded in closing down several of these in November 1981. With the compromise of so many air and overland routes since late 1981, deliveries by sea have increased. From the southeast coast of El Salvador, these supplies then move inland along various routes to the north and northwest.

The 5,000 full-time front line and 5,000-10,000 part-time guerrillas consume much more materiel each month than they capture from government forces. Three months ago--in mid-December 1981--Fidel Castro decided, in consultation with guerrilla leaders, that external supplies of arms to Salvadoran guerrilla units should be stepped up to make possible an offensive to prevent a peaceful vote in the March 28 Constituent Assembly elections. Extreme leftist groups throughout Central America were mobilized to support the effort.

Shipments of arms into El Salvador have increased markedly within the past three months. Early this month, for example, a guerrilla unit in El Salvador received several thousand sticks of

TNT and detonators. Five sticks of TNT are sufficient to blow up an electrical pylon. Last month, a Salvadoran guerrilla group picked up a large shipment of arms on the Usulután coast. This shipment came by sea from storage sites in Nicaragua. These and other recent external supply efforts have furnished heavy weapons, including M-60 machine guns, 57 mm recoilless rifles, and M-72 antitank weapons, thus significantly increasing guerrilla firepower.

#### Overland Shipments

Immediately after the failed January 1981 insurgent offensive in El Salvador, and in response to US diplomatic pressure and Honduran interdiction efforts, the Sandinistas began to scale down deliveries of arms by air and search for alternate routes and methods. They have since relied heavily on overland routes through Honduras, which are more secure than air deliveries, although restricted to smaller shipments.

In early January 1981, Honduran police intercepted a shipment of arms concealed in a large truck enroute from Nicaragua. The police caught six individuals unloading weapons, who identified themselves as Salvadorans and members of the International Support Commission of the Salvadoran Popular Liberation Forces (FPL). They had in their possession a large number of altered and forged Honduran, Costa Rican, and Salvadoran passports and other identity documents. This one truck contained over 100 M-16 automatic rifles, fifty 81 mm mortar rounds, approximately 100,000 rounds of 5.56 mm ammunition, machine gun belts, field packs, and first aid kits.

Over 50 of these M-16 rifles have been traced to US weapons stocks in Vietnam.

In late March 1981, Honduran authorities at the Nicaraguan border seized 15,000 rounds of ammunition concealed in a truck belonging to a Nicaraguan trucking company. The ammunition reportedly was to be delivered to Guatemalan insurgent safehouses in Honduras. Honduran security forces subsequently uncovered a network for arms distribution to leftist groups in Honduras, El Salvador, and Guatemala. The network apparently received weapons overland from Nicaragua and maintained caches in Guatemala and Honduras.

Honduran authorities have continued to intercept arms smuggled from Nicaragua. Another truck was apparently heading for Guatemala when it was captured in April 1981 crossing into Honduras from Nicaragua. Ammunition and propaganda materials were hidden in the side walls of the trailer.

Central American arms smugglers have established, with Sandinista and Cuban support, an elaborate surveillance system designed to avoid detection by Honduran authorities. Even when arms shipments are captured, it is sometimes impossible to determine whether they were intended for Guatemalan, Honduran, or Salvadoran terrorists, since the arms supply networks established by Cuba and Nicaragua are funnelling lethal military supplies to all three countries, using the same clandestine smuggling techniques and routes.

Air Deliveries

The direct airlift of weapons from Nicaragua to guerrillas in El Salvador became systematic and large scale with the establishment of Papalonal airfield. This remote area northwest of Managua is accessible only by dirt roads. In late July 1980, the airfield was an agricultural dirt airstrip approximately 800 meters long. By mid-December, the length had been increased to approximately 1,200 meters; a turnaround had been added to each end; a dispersal parking area with three hardstands--a feature typical of a military airfield--had been constructed at the west end of the runway; three parking aprons had been cleared; and three hangar/storage buildings, each about 15 meters wide, had been constructed on one of the aprons. After mid-December, at least three more hangars and two support buildings were added, and other additions were begun. The hangars were to stockpile arms for the Salvadoran guerrillas. These hangars resembled those at major Cuban airbases. C-47 flights from the airbase corresponded with sightings in El Salvador. Five pilots in Nicaragua who regularly flew the route into El Salvador have been identified.

Deliveries from Papalonal dropped dramatically as a result of the January 1981 capture of pilot Julio Romero by Salvadoran officials. Pilot recruitment then became difficult, despite Sandinista offers of substantial bonuses to fly the route. Nevertheless, several clandestine missions out of Papalonal dropped supplies and ammunition to insurgents in El Salvador last spring. There also have been frequent sightings of unidentified



aircraft in Salvadoran guerrilla zones, including sightings of small planes dropping bundles. The commander of the Sandinista Air Force is directly involved in the arms flights and reports to Defense Minister Humberto Ortega on support activities.

#### Sea Deliveries Deliveries

Sea deliveries, usually at night, from Nicaragua to El Salvador follow many routes. For example, one route goes from Potosi in Nicaragua to Jupinol, Honduras, by small fishing boat; the supplies are loaded on small vehicles, taken to the Pan American Highway, transferred to public buses, and transported to the Chalatenango region in El Salvador. Another route is from Potosi to Jupinol, to Punta Raton, to Gueguensi Island, and then by road to El Salvador; this route supplies guerrillas on the Salvadoran southern front. A third route goes from Corinto and other Pacific ports in Nicaragua via merchant ship to points 10-15 miles offshore from El Salvador where the arms are transferred to small fishing vessels. A fourth route is from Nicaragua's Atlantic Coast up the Aguan River and other coastal points in Honduras and then overland to El Salvador.

#### OTHER SUPPORT

##### Command and Control

The military forces of the Salvadoran guerrilla movement are controlled by the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (DRU) with three members from each of the guerrilla groups. The DRU was formed in Havana in 1980 after meetings that began under Castro's sponsorship in late 1979. This pattern of Cuban-promoted unification followed by increased Cuban aid--applied previously

in Nicaragua and since then elsewhere in Central America--draws on ideologically-committed Cuban-trained military cadres to ensure Marxist-Leninist control of the insurgent process and any government emerging subsequently from it.

The DRU command headquarters is in Nicaragua and is part of an extremely sophisticated command and control relationship. Planning and operations are directed from this headquarters and flow to guerrilla units widely spread throughout El Salvador. This headquarters coordinates logistical support for the insurgents, which includes food, medicines, clothing, money, weapons, and ammunition. Although some free-lancing inevitably exists, the Managua headquarters decides on locations to be attacked as well as coordinating supply deliveries. Cuban and Nicaraguan military officers are present at DRU guerrilla headquarters in Nicaragua, where they are intimately and routinely involved in planning Salvadoran operations.

#### Training

Nicaragua and Cuba are training regional guerrillas in a wide range of sophisticated military and sabotage techniques. Salvadoran guerrillas have been trained in tactics, weapons, communications, and explosives at temporary training schools and on military bases scattered around Nicaragua. Guerrillas travel to Cuba through Nicaragua for more specialized training in sabotage and demolition, which has enabled them to perform sophisticated operations such as the attacks on Ilopango Airbase and on the Oro bridge.

Honduran police recovered documents in a November 1981 raid on a leftist safehouse in Tegucigalpa which indicated that the group had been formed in Nicaragua at the instigation of high-level Sandinistas and had received military training in Nicaragua and Cuba. Members of a Salvadoran terrorist group arrested in January 1982 by Costa Rican police after an unsuccessful attempt to kidnap a Salvadoran businessman admitted they had spent six months at a safehouse in Managua where they had received military training alongside the People's Militia being trained by the Sandinista army. They were supplied with false documentation for travel to Costa Rica.

A former Salvadoran guerrilla who surrendered in September 1981 has provided detailed information concerning Cuban training programs and Nicaraguan support for them. The individual [redacted] [redacted] traveled to Cuba via Managua in May 1980. A Cuban officer in Managua escorted 32 Salvadoran trainees to a Cubana airliner, sidestepping normal customs procedures. False documentation was provided by the Cuban Government. This individual's training in Cuba lasted six months and included underwater demolition; his principal task upon returning to El Salvador was to sabotage Salvadoran naval vessels, bridges, hydroelectric plants, and port facilities. He stated that at least 900 Salvadorans were receiving specialized military training in Cuba at that time in infantry, artillery, special operations, air operations, and political indoctrination. Following the course, the trainees returned to El Salvador by several routes, through Mexico, Nicaragua, Guatemala, Honduras,

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Costa Rica, and Panama. The individual who surrendered left Cuba aboard an Aeroflot aircraft on 15 December 1980 with several groups of Salvadoran guerrillas.

#### HUMAN RIGHTS

The human rights performance of the Sandinista regime continues to deteriorate. Over the past two years, the regime has restricted the activities of non-Sandinista political groups, private sector organizations, and independent media and labor unions by the arbitrary application of already repressive laws and by extralegal means, such as the use of mob violence. In addition, the Sandinistas continue to hold approximately 4,500 prisoners convicted under dubious standards of justice.

Now, over 10,000 Miskito Indians have fled to Honduras since January to escape forced relocation, after the destruction of almost all Indian villages in a 100-kilometer-wide swath along the Rio Coco. Those who did not flee have been moved by the government to detention camps, where they will be confined and guarded until they are forcibly resettled on lands alien to them. The Catholic Church in Nicaragua criticized this treatment of the Indians in an Episcopal report, and the Sandinista government responded with its most bitter denunciation of the Church to date.

Last Saturday, government forces arrested 19 Jehovah's Witnesses missionaries and have expelled them from the country. A Protestant clergyman who was imprisoned in Puerto Cabezas was killed Friday by security forces, allegedly while attempting to escape according to an official Ministry of Interior announcement.

The Law of National Emergency recently announced by the regime has suspended even more civil liberties:

- Radio Catolica has been closed down indefinitely and all radio news programs, except official news statements, are prohibited.
- La Prensa and all other media must submit news stories for prior censorship.
- Opposition political leaders have been informed that they cannot leave the country; the passport of one politician was seized when he attempted to make a routine trip abroad.
- The government plans to impose a "patriotic tax" on some businesses to help finance its latest mobilization campaign.
- All discussions in the Sandinista-controlled Council of State of the proposed media and political parties laws have been suspended.
- The Ministry of Interior has made an unspecified number of "preventative arrests" of people who are suspected of having ties with counterrevolutionaries.

#### PLO and Libyan Role

PLO chief Yasir Arafat confirmed to a group of Palestinian journalists in January 1982 that "there are Palestinian pilots in Nicaragua, there are Palestinian revolutionaries with the revolutionaries in El Salvador . . . ."

SUBJECT: Response to Nicaragua's Complaint to the UN Security  
Council, 19 March 1982

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